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AUTHOR Evans, Max W.
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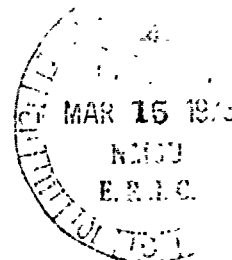
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SCHOOL EVALUATION

A LEVER FOR MEANINGFUL CHANGE



A Presentation to the 78th
Annual North Central Association Meeting
Chicago, Illinois
March 25, 1973

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SCHOOL EVALUATION - A LEVER FOR MEANINGFUL CHANGE

The purpose of this paper is to suggest that the principal who genuinely wants to change things in his school has a potentially powerful tool at his disposal in the North Central Association plan for school evaluation. The primary sources for my remarks are my experiences - as a teacher, principal, supervisor and superintendent in the public schools and a university teacher in the field of educational administration -- and my observations of schools and school systems as they have attempted to change, or resist change, as the case may be. I must admit, too, that I am influenced in my remarks by an increasing interest in the field of organizations, how people behave in organizations, and change processes. Perhaps I should also add that as a part of my experience I have participated in the North Central Association accreditation activities both as a member and as chairman of visiting teams and, as a former school administrator, I have been on the receiving end of visitations.

It seems to me that my comments are based upon three rather simple, straightforward assumptions. (And it is not my intent to complicate them as the evening goes on.) Those assumptions are as follows: (1) that our system of education, even in the best schools, falls far short of being what it can and should be, and thus needs to be improved; (2) that the school principal is a key agent in the improvement of education in American schools; and (3) that external agencies, such as the North Central Association, can be a dynamic force for educational change when it is coupled with some creative and courageous leadership by school principals. Let me elaborate a bit upon these ideas.

First, take the matter of the schools needing change - to become more effective and efficient in achieving their goals. Even if the schools were in a literal state

of perfection today, they would need to change tomorrow because the world in which our schools function is changing so rapidly. New knowledge, new technology, new aspirations, new indignities, new values, new needs - they all come rolling back into the schools like a tidal wave. To stand still in our educational efforts in this day and age may be to perish; certainly it is to doom children to lives which are less than what they otherwise might be. To enter into thoughtful and aggressive programs for educational reform will not mean that all children's and society's needs are going to be met - the job is much too complex to even suggest that - but such action can help some kids somewhat and that is what educational leadership is all about.

The rapidity of change in certain segments of society continues to astound me. One example of this has struck me particularly. In 1968, my family and I went to Nigeria to live and work for two years. At the time we left the United States discussion of the abortion question was still taking place mainly in the Sunday newspaper supplements. When we returned from Africa two years later, that controversial subject had moved from the newspapers to the state legislative bodies and several states had made abortions legal. Just a few weeks ago the United States Supreme Court, in effect, rewrote the abortion laws for forty-six of our fifty states and it is estimated that one point six million abortions will be performed legally in the United States this year. Basically, according to polls which I have seen over the past two years, the American people support a pro-abortion position. Now I submit to you that this represents a major value shift among the American people.

The field of education is experiencing its own major value shifts. Perhaps the one coming through most clearly today relates to the matter of accountability - how well we are doing that with which we have been charged. From everywhere, it would seem that these voices are negative, down on established education. And this is

coming at a time when schools, despite their many shortcomings, are probably doing their best job ever. It may be small consolation to embattled administrators, but it seems to me that the intense attention given to the shortcomings of education today continues to underscore the high expectations and values which the American people hold for institutionalized education in this age. It is not likely that educators are going to be able to wriggle off the accountability hook in the foreseeable future. State and national legislatures, funding agencies, and the local voters are going to see to that.

If it is true that our institutions for educating our young people must change, or be reformed, who is going to lead the way? Well, obviously many have contributions to make. Researchers and developers can discover new truths and package new knowledge and materials for use by teachers and learners; colleges of education can contribute by identifying, recruiting and training the kinds of teachers needed by today's children and youth; state departments and federal agencies have leadership roles to play in stimulating the development and trial of innovative approaches; and the local community and board of education exert a major influence upon their schools through their support, both financial and moral, and through the kinds of expectations which they establish for the schools. But none of these groups or agencies have the assigned responsibility for operating and leading the schools on a day-by-day, week-by-week, and year-by-year basis. Schools administrators have been hired and are being held accountable for that job, and if the schools are to be improved, it will be essentially in the ways in which the school leadership wants them improved.

All of this brings me to my second assumption - that the school principal is a key agent in the improvement of education in American schools. I'm sure that many principals have always known that theirs was an important job in the educational

scheme-of-things, but in recent years there has literally been a new discovery by the larger educational world of the crucial nature of the principalship role. As a former principal, I delight in the recognition, albeit long-delayed, which is being accorded the principalship today. But I'm not at all sure that most principals are ready or able to assume the new role which is emerging so rapidly for them.

Let's take a look at some of the recent things being found out and being said about leadership in schools. In 1966, the staff of the University Elementary School in U.C.L.A. visited more than two hundred and fifty classrooms in one hundred schools. The findings of this study revealed that the principals, on the whole, were rather unaware of the instruction going on in their schools; that they were generally satisfied with what was taking place; and that they possessed no clear plan as to what they wanted to change, improve, or accomplish in and with their schools. The principals' attention was focused on the immediate, the daily maintenance and operation of the schools. Goodlad wrote with regard to that study, "We concluded that only rarely were the principals and their staffs involved in planning and dialogue about the mission of their schools and means for fulfillment of mission." ¹

In the recent Ford Foundation sponsored study of the American principalship entitled Leadership in Public Education Study: A Look at the Overlooked, Donald Mitchel stated, "As principals become entrenched as administrators or line officers directly responsible to the central administration, some became aware of and exploited the opportunity to provide true leadership to their schools. But most did not.

¹John I. Goodlad, "Educational Change: A Strategy for Study and Action," in Louis J. Rubin (ed.), Frontiers in School Leadership, Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1970, p. 13.

Principals were slow to take advantage of the opportunity for professional leadership offered to them." ²

Rubin places the responsibility for the quality of education squarely with school principals. While acknowledging that quality schools are a complex phenomena depending also upon faculty, materials and organization, he writes, "When the qualities which separate good schools from bad schools are analyzed, the influence of the principal becomes obvious. Indeed, the quality of a school seems to depend more on the principal than on any other single factor in the formula. Good principals develop good schools; bad ones do not." ³ Rubin believes that the principal has more potential influence on teaching than any other administrator. Moreover, he writes, "most innovations must be fitted to the conditions which exist in the particular school and it is the principal who is in the best position to administer the fitting process." ⁴

A final comment with regard to leadership in schools would appear to be in order. Studies of change show that it is often impossible for teachers to initiate innovations despite their apparently logical position to do so. This is particularly the case if the principal has not been able to develop a climate which supports that innovative behavior by teachers. It is also true that it is nearly impossible to modify a staff's beliefs and practices in the face of administrative resistance. Even when changes are mandated by a principal's superordinates, skepticism or outright rejection are quickly sensed by the staff and new programs are undermined. Any change to which the principal is opposed has little chance of unqualified success.

³Louis J. Rubin, "Principals and Teachers: Orchestration of Autonomy" in Louis J. Rubin (ed.) Frontiers in School Leadership, Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1970, p. 13.

⁴Ibid., p. 105.

There are, of course, other reasons for the ascending significance of the principalship but perhaps these quotations serve amply to make my point that school principals are the gate keepers of educational change.

Let us move on to my third assumption for this paper which is that the accreditation and evaluation process, such as that established by the North Central Association, can be a dynamic force for educational change in our schools. I earnestly believe that statement, but please note that I used the word "can" rather than "is". Whether the North Central Association evaluation is regarded as a bother, something to be feared, or an opportunity to exploit may well depend upon several factors, but I feel reasonably certain that among the most important is the attitude and expressed position of the principal with regard to the whole process. Later on, I want to elaborate upon some of the specific things which I think principals can do to make more effective use of this process to change their schools. But before doing that, I want to discuss a few concepts of change and change process.

I have already made reference to the rapidity of social and technical change in our world. Now I want to make reference to the resistance to change which resides in most of our social institutions, including those of an educational nature. Despite our best educational steps forward, to date, there is considerable evidence mounting that in some schools the problems are building more rapidly than solutions. Let me illustrate this point from a recent report in the New York Times of the Ford Foundation Comprehensive School Improvement Program.⁵ During the 1960's Ford put thirty million dollars into grants in twenty-five communities across the country. The intent of these projects was to point the way to new educational planning - to stimulate educational reform. The report concludes that the total impact of the

5 The New York Times, December 17, 1972, Sec. 4, p. 7

reform movement has been slight. Most innovations failed to "catch on" in a significant way. A fundamental weakness was that reforms could not respond fast enough to changes in society and that too much of the successful experimentation was carried out in well-to-do suburbs. Leadership was the major ingredient in the projects which succeeded and survived. But the major roadblock to reform was conservatism both in the profession and among the public.⁶

The emerging role of the principal saddles him squarely with the responsibility for bringing about change in institutions that don't want to change. If he is to have even a modicum of success, he needs to be well fortified with an understanding of organizations and what makes them, and the people in them, tick. There probably is no substitute for this knowledge of change and change processes. (Parenthetically speaking, this area could well represent one of the most conspicuous inadequacies or oversights in university administrator preparation programs today.)

Allow me at this point to share with you some of my notions of the major concepts which must be dealt with in an understanding or change. While the concepts which I have listed in this paper should not be considered complete, they are illustrative of the conceptual understanding and skills which leaders in organizations must come to grips with if they are to change either the goals of the organization or the means for achieving those goals.

1. Individualization. If any one generic statement can be made regarding change efforts, it is that each is unique. That which worked in one place may not work or be the most appropriate change in another. As the situation changes, so does the nature of the change effort which is employed.

⁶ Ibid.

2. Decision making. The heart of the change process is making decisions. It is at this point that information pointing toward change, and action to implement it, meet. It is important to consider not only what decisions are made, but also who participates in making them.

3. Strategy and staging. Those responsible for change efforts must always consider the strategy they will employ in bringing about change. Many change efforts fail because the leadership does not have a carefully thought through plan for how the change will be implemented. A helpful way to devise that plan is to think in terms of the stages through which persons must move, or be moved, in order to accomplish the change.

4. Long-range planning. If a change effort is going to represent more than a "flash in the pan," then the change effort needs to be integrated into the long-range plans of the organization. When this is not done, change efforts appear to be whimsical or transitory modifications which do not alter basic organizational realities.

5. Conflict. Most administrators tend to feel that any conflict existing in their organization is a sign of dysfunction. Conflict in change efforts is a normal phenomena and can be utilized. If leadership is aware of this, it will help to prevent them from undoing the beneficial results of change by over-reaction to the conflict which ensues.

6. Opinion leaders. One reality of organizational life is that the opinions of some persons carry greater weight than do those of others. As the wag puts it, "some opinions are more equal than others." It is of considerable importance that those persons who tend to shape the opinions of the organization be made allies to the change effort. If they are not made such, they can easily bring the entire change effort to a halt.

7. Pressure points. Even though a change effort is designed to be brought about with a minimum exercise of power, realities inform us that power is very much a part of change efforts. The problem is to find those places where power should be used. If power is not subtly in the background, persons will assume the change effort is not serious. If it is over-used, or used in the wrong places, it will produce great amounts of resistance.

8. Values. All change efforts must be cast in such fashions that they do not appear to violate the values of the persons involved. Sometimes this is merely a matter of semantics or the way things are presented. Sometimes there are real value questions involved and the time must be taken to work through these questions in order to obtain cooperation.

9. Costs. It is more than obvious to say that change efforts must have acceptable costs. It is important that groups of persons not be involved in creating change plans which would be most beneficial, but which cannot be financed. Demoralization follows close upon frustrated change efforts that have commitments behind them.

10. Communication. In any change effort it is vital to maintain extensive communication throughout the organization. In times of uncertainty, such as during change, many viewpoints are expressed. If multiple channels of communication do not exist, then rumors will abound and the change effort impeded.

11. Consultants. The woods of change are full of persons who desire to offer their consultative services to others. Sometimes a consultant or a consultant team can be most helpful. However, it is essential that the consultant is right for the situation and can really deliver. Rather frequently leadership will depend too much on consultants and will thereby create a host of new problems.

12. Self-motivation. Successful change efforts tend to come about when those involved in the changes perceive their participation as a result of their own motivation. When persons see their participation as voluntary, the change effort will move more effectively. Participation from the earliest stages is one way to foster these attitudes.

13. Emotions. Most persons are quite emotionally involved in their organizations. It is crucial, but sometimes slow and painful, to deal with the emotions that arise in change efforts. It would be nice, perhaps, if persons responded rationally to all events, but frequently they do not. If emotions are not dealt with, they can cause to fail the most rational and well thought out change effort.

14. The leader's motives. A crucial factor in the change process is the perception held by the followers of the leader's motives. If, for example, the effort to bring about change in a school is seen by teachers primarily as a scheme to increase the principal's power base, to build a reputation for the principal, or as a senseless display of authority, the teacher will undoubtedly respond in a negative way to proposed changes. For leadership to be effective, the message communicated from the principal to his staff must be perceived as being honest as well as sensible.

Let us now readdress the question of how the evaluation process can be a lever for meaningful change in the schools. There is a substantial body of thought among social scientists that most changes are introduced into the educational system by pressure from outside the system itself. Any practicing administrator today, or an observant member of a teaching staff, can testify to the impact of court rulings, legislative action, levy defeats, parent and student groups, or even accreditation agencies upon schools and colleges. But there is also a growing literature dealing with the concept of leadership which speaks to the notion of proaction rather than reaction. Proactive leadership is concerned with the voluntary identification, or

seeking out, of problems in the school which need attention rather than only reacting or making accommodations on the basis of problems identified or presented by others outside the system. Anyone with a shred of school administration experience knows that externally generated problems aren't going to go away. No matter how proactive our leadership stance might be, if for no other reason than that our schools really do belong to the people and their voices will be heard. But there is a great need for leadership of an "offensive" nature which aggressively seeks to ferret out significant barriers or blocks to better education in the schools and to change the school in such a way that students gain. The creative use of the North Central Association accreditation and evaluation process can, to use the vernacular, allow the principal to "put it all together", that is, to utilize the pressures of the outside accrediting agency and the visiting team along with the voluntary identification by the school staff and administration of problems or points of needed change within the educational program.

The remainder of my paper is intended to be of a specific vein. It is my main purpose from this point on to suggest some leadership acts or behaviors which would enable the principal to use school evaluation as a base for change. I realize that there is a potential danger in becoming too specific as to the leadership acts which are most appropriate to a given situation. Hopefully, this will not occur. On the other hand, bringing about effective change involves careful planning and strategy and the matters which I am about to suggest reflect critical areas in the change process. Please rest assured that I believe that art remains very much a part of the leadership process.

1. First of all, the principal has to make a conscious decision as to whether he does indeed plan to utilize the North Central Association evaluation as a kickoff point for a substantial change effort. In a few schools in our country, faculties

are continuously engaged with innovation and change, and thus the self-study aspect of accreditation represents only an extension of an on-going assessment effort which functions continuously. My experience, regrettably, is that far too many principals see the accreditation and evaluation only as an end in itself, thus they are motivated primarily, or even exclusively, toward proving that their schools should continue to be accredited. In these cases, the faculty and students will be well on their way to "school as usual" a day or so after the visiting team departs. The North Central Association leaves no doubt about the outcomes it is seeking from school evaluation: those expectations are change and improvement. Stanavage puts it this way, "It is an effort to help an individual school reach toward higher goals, to assist the school in discovering where it is and where it wants to go, to aid the school in bringing about those changes that can result in heightened effectiveness."⁷

2. Generate as much support as possible from those above you in the educational hierarchy. Anticipate that things are going to happen which will have consequences or implications beyond the walls of your school and that the awareness, understanding, and support of your superordinates may be very essential to your leadership effectiveness. Don't overlook the fact, in soliciting the support of those above you, that what grows out of one school's evaluation effort should also be contributing to the system-wide objectives held by the superintendent and board. It is not unusual that the North Central Association evaluations and reports have been persuasive in convincing boards and communities of imperative school needs.

3. In some way the principal must communicate to the staff that the up-coming school evaluation is more than a perfunctory exercise - that it represents the beginning of a continuing, long-range effort to bring improvement to the educational

⁷John Stanavage, "A Demanding Yet Rewarding Professional Task," in N.C.A. Secondary Commission, Leadership for Quality Evaluation, Chicago: N.C.A., 1970, p. 1.

PROGRAM In schools where the staffs have not been involved in innovation and change, this will represent a critical leadership act and must be carefully thought out. In so doing, the principal will need to consider not only the staff (his followers) and his own leadership style, but also the dynamics and statics of the situation. Change usually creates anxiety, tension, and conflict. The skillful leader recognizes this, anticipates it, and seeks to keep it within productive limits. While communicating to the staff his expectations for high quality in the school, the staff will need reassurances that the principal is in the struggle with them and will assist to the limit of his abilities.

No doubt among some of the other attitudes and ideas which a principal will want to convey to the staff are the following: 1) that change is desirable, necessary, and expected; 2) that staff participation in the identification of educational needs and the solutions to problems is essential to effective change; 3) that once the self-study is completed, attention will be turned immediately to dealing with the weaknesses and recommendations identified by the teachers, rather than sitting back several months or a year waiting for a report from the visiting committee.

4. If I were a principal interested in using the North Central Association evaluation as a base for change, I would be keenly interested in the make-up of the visiting team. The report of the team visitation is an important document and its credibility will be dependent in large measure upon the professional reputation of the team members. Communicate to your staff the calibre of individual which you hope to be on the visiting committee and listen carefully to any suggestions which teachers may have. The chairman of the visiting team has a key responsibility in the evaluation process. Make sure you get one in whom you have the utmost confidence and I further suggest you pay him an honorarium. In all probability, he will be spending countless hours working for your school in addition to carrying on with his regular job.

5. Establishing a climate for change in schools today also involves communications with students. In many respects, the students know more of what is wrong with education today than the rest of us do. When the issues become hot enough, the students do assume active roles as we have seen in recent years. I would strongly urge principals to plan for student participation in the self-study process as well as in the activities growing out of it. I am fully aware of the potential problems which are involved when students start telling teachers and administrators that they are not doing a good job, but student perceptions are a vital part of the data which must be considered in the school evaluation process.

6. The final written report of the visiting team is, in my judgment, a most important document. It contains, in print, statements regarding weaknesses in the school program and recommendations for improvement. If the contents of the report differ markedly from the perceptions held by staff members and administration about the school program, one can anticipate a variety of reactions, including strong and emotional ones from people in those areas being criticized. It has been my experience that the final report of a strong team will have an abundance of recommendations and suggestions for improving the educational program and thus may convey to the recipients of the report an overly critical tone. The reaction of the principal at this point will be critical to future change efforts. If he is defensive and unable to examine the report in an objective manner, then substantial improvement based upon the findings and recommendations of the visiting team is not likely, because the principal will have signaled his true values--satisfaction with the status quo - to the staff. On the other hand, the opinions of a knowledgeable group of outside educators can be convincing about the need for change and the principal should maximize the opportunity to remove complacencies

about the adequacies of the program. In some schools, objective critical reports by the North Central evaluation team have "unfrozen" the situation, giving the principal the power base which was needed to go ahead with the change.

7. The degree of openness or "publicness" with which the principal carries out the evaluation process can exert considerable influence upon the principal's leadership base. While it is not possible to prescribe here in detail how a principal should behave in order to create openness, it can be stated with a good deal of conviction that fundamental change is more likely in a school climate where beliefs and feelings can be expressed freely without fear of retribution or punishment. On the principal's part, openness involves the courage, security, and diplomacy to discuss problems, weaknesses and failure in the system in such a way that teachers are not alienated or excoriated.

To make "public" the matters which should make up the real agenda of the schools is a radical departure from the typical behavior of most school people, where conventional policy has sought to present only the favorable side of school programs. If the real problems of the school are to be dealt with effectively, it is my belief that they must be brought into the open where they can be discussed, debated, researched, and acted upon by those who should rightfully be concerned. To pretend or proclaim that all is well in most schools these days is naive at best, but more likely an invitation to a credibility gap between school officials and the many in our constituencies who know better. Trust is an important ingredient in leadership and an atmosphere of candor is more likely to develop trusting relationships than will closed-mouthed behaviors which are perceived by others as secretive or evasive.

8. A final suggestion to principals, wanting to maximize the impetus of the North Central Association evaluation process as a lever for change relates to the

activity which follows the receipt of the report of the visiting team. If reaccreditation rather than program improvement was the true purpose of the evaluation exercise, then copies of the report will quickly and quietly find their way into the files, cupboards and drawers, for most schools, I suspect, achieve reaccreditation status. But if the principal is seeking support for substantial change within his school, then his leadership in acting upon the report is crucial. In many ways it is accurate to say that everything which has happened up to this point - the self-study, the visiting team evaluation, the written report - is prologue. The real pay-off of the evaluation process is yet to come, if it comes.

It is at this point where I believe the principal is charged with responsibility for developing and articulating what I call a Master Plan of Action. It is the Master Plan of Action which should set forth, out of the welter of staff and team criticisms and recommendations an orderly, systematic basis for analyzing and attacking the problems of education in the school. Obviously, this is not something which the principal does unilaterally; open discussions with the faculty and students, perhaps parents as well, would seem to be called for. The important point to realize is that this is a time of self-initiated leadership by the principal. Moving forward aggressively with plans and action at this point has to come from commitment and understanding on the part of the principal; leadership can't be forced upon him from the outside.

The need for a Master Plan of Action is well illustrated by a recent personal experience in which I served as chairman of a visiting team of forty-five members assembled from nine institutions of higher education and fourteen high schools in a two-state area. The final report of the team's visit contained a listing of one hundred and thirty-three weaknesses in the school program and operation and one hundred and seventy-one recommendations for ways to improve this high school of

one thousand and three hundred students. The recommendations ranged across a wide spectrum, on the end suggesting that the principal not interrupt classes incessantly with routine announcements and on the other end, a recommendation that the establishment of a county-wide joint vocational school would be an important alternative to weigh in meeting important program needs in the district as well as solving space problems.

I tried to imagine myself in the position of the school officials and staff receiving this report. Despite the fact that the team was unanimous in its recommendations that this school be continued for accreditation, for its sixty-eighth year incidently, it was obvious to the visitors that much needed to be done in the school. Now one cannot start in studying or trying to implement one hundred and seventy-one different recommendations all at once, he has to have a plan. I have never heard how the school officials responded to this report, but I told them in the concluding section of the report something of how I saw it. I found six critical factors which had been identified or alluded to by the staff's own self-study and the visiting team's observations. In brief, I saw the one hundred seventy-one recommendations as pointing to the following major needs in the high school:

1. A curriculum that provided more flexible learning opportunities for students not bound for college.
2. More space in order to expand the educational program.
3. A planned program of professional growth for the staff.
4. More instructional materials and more modern methods of instruction.
5. Flexibility in student scheduling and programing and in staff assignment.
6. The development of a climate conducive to change.

It seemed to me that it was less mind-bogging to think of six major program development thrusts than it was to try to deal with dozens and dozens of disparate recommendations. But I also saw those same one hundred seventy-one recommendations

falling into other kinds of categories and these are equally as important in developing a Master Plan of Action as those mentioned above. These categories were identified as follows: some recommendations cost money, others don't; some could be implemented immediately, others take years; some can be implemented by individual teachers, others will require groups to work together; some involve only the high school staff, others require participation from outside school personnel, the central office, board, or community; some recommendations require facilities, space, and hardware; while others need ingenuity, creativity, and people who care.

In bringing this presentation to its close, I want to return again to the original point of it all: that the school evaluation process promulgated by the North Central Association can be a powerful and effective base for launching significant change efforts in the schools. Keep in mind, however, that the critical factor in whether this does or does not happen is not the process but the principal. He is the one who can capitalize on the opportunity presented, bring the process to life, and make it all happen. He wields the real levers for meaningful educational change.